

Officers

David Nobles
President

Larry Snider
Vice-President

Jeff Deem
Treasurer

Tom Raffetto
Secretary

Honorary Board

Buzz Brown
Rob Brown
Scott Burgess
William DuVal
Herb Gordon
Sonny Haynes
Walter Hooker
Vance Hopkins
Lucius Kellam
Tom O'Connor
Michael Parker
Thelma Peterson
George Reiger
Chris Thalimer
Court VanClef
M Bagley Walker
Mike Wilcox
Bob Pride

Board

David Agee
Bob Allen
Rob Allen
John Bello
Jerry Benson
Bill Bradley
John Coleman
Rob Cowling
James Cross
Jeff Deem
Scott Edwards
Irv Fenton
Kevin Grimsdale
Mark Horner
Larry I'Anson
William Lechler
Jon Marker
Chris Moore
David Nobles
Nelson Ortiz
Carl Onesty
Peter Paul
Tom Powers
Tom Raffetto
William Seymour
Larry Snider
Tripp Upshur
Tom Welch
Evan Williams
Brian Workman
Heidi Workman
Keith Workman



Coastal Conservation Association Virginia

24 August 2007

COASTAL CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION OF VIRGINIA
11620 Tyshire Terrace
Providence Forge VA 23140

Virginia Recreational Fishing Advisory Board
C/O Jack Travelstead
Virginia Marine Resources Commission
2600 Washington Avenue
Newport News, VA 23607

Dear RFAB Members:

The CCA of VA Fisheries Management Committee has reviewed the proposals submitted to your board and has formulated the following positions.

Multi-Year Projects for Renewal:

A. 2008 Children's Fishing Clinic (Year 11). SUPPORT. The original hallmark for a host of similar subsequent programs, we continue to support this and the following event as classic affairs that very effectively expose a large number of youth to both the recreational enjoyment and conservation ethics of saltwater sport fishing.

B. 2008 Kiwanis Club Children's Fishing Clinic (Year 7). SUPPORT. See comments above.

C. 2008 Virginia Game Fish Tagging (Year 14). SUPPORT. Our comments from last year continue to reflect our continuing support to this important program: *"we remain committed to supporting this valuable, long-standing program. By continuing to provide critical data on virtually every recreationally significant species, it has been extremely important in the successful management of our saltwater fishery. As we have noted previously, the program not only contributes valuable finfish data for scientific and management communities, but also attracts an expanding cadre of volunteer taggers who have helped expand the conservation ethic through their efforts."*

Dedicated to Conserving, Protecting and Restoring Virginia's Marine Fisheries

11620 Tyshire Terrace Providence Forge, VA 23140

Email: CCAVA@cox.net Phone 804-966-5654 Website: www.joincca.org

D. Federal Assistance (Wallop-Breaux) Matching Funds FY 2008. **DO NOT SUPPORT.**

Although we are pleased to see the commercial fund will be providing a portion to this match, their proposed \$75,000 is \$25,000 **less than the previous year**, and is **nowhere equivalent** to the \$283,512 (approximately \$60,000 **over last year**) for which the recreational fund is being tapped. Furthermore, our comments regarding the 2005 request still echo our overall perspective on this issue: *“any future requests for WB offset should be financed entirely from the commercial fund, given the rationale that the WB federal portion is itself derived indirectly from the recreational sector”, and “that it is important the RFAB stands firm in demanding 100% of matching funding be derived from the commercial industry in all subsequent funding cycles”*. Although it seems we are yet again in the situation of acknowledging a failure to fund this match would have detrimental consequences to our ability to effectively manage our finfish resources, we cannot support this request, in its present form, with its imbalance between recreational and commercial funding.

E. Sheepshead Population Dynamics in Chesapeake Bay, Virginia (Year 3). **SUPPORT.** Our comments from last year continue to accurately reflect our position of continued support for this study. *“Our organization has been in the forefront in expressing concerns over the potential threat to this unregulated and rapidly expanding fishery. While our initial concerns first emerged over five years ago, the intervening timeframe has seen a “discovery” of the resource by recreational fishermen similar to that of the fast “learning curve” accompanying spadefish angling interest. As we stated last year in our initial support of this request, “while we perceive the definite need for at least some minimal form of protection for sheepshead, we feel any such initiative is best based upon key life cycle and population structure data of those fish frequenting Virginia waters.” We therefore encouraged the local academic community to consider a comprehensive study to address the apparent lack of scientific data on this species. This study will provide fisheries managers with information necessary to more intelligently manage this species that has become very important to the state’s recreational anglers. The petitioners are to be commended for conscientiously providing feedback to the board and angling community on their initial progress/data. Some of these findings, most notably those concerning the apparent age of some of the specimens (i.e. 9 lbs = 17 yrs), tend to reinforce our concerns that this species will definitely require some protection in the form of enlightened limits. In fact, the VMRC should even be open to the concept of near-term management steps as early as fall 2007, if data from the study is compelling. Otherwise, a “routine” timeline might not dictate any action until after the conclusion of the entire three-year study in 2008 (with limit impositions enacted no earlier than 2009).”* Regarding the final previous comments, it should be noted the issue of interim limits pending the outcome of the study was addressed by the VMRC in April of this year. While our organization felt the limits enacted (4 fish per day for the recreational sector & a 500 lb vessel limit for the commercial sector) were in no way equitable, we were nevertheless pleased some measure of protection has been afforded. At that time we also suggested the VMRC consider the addition of a minimum length stipulation that no more than one fish over 23 inches could be retained. While that measure was not enacted, it should be noted the most recent recommendations of the ODU researchers included this as a measure that should be considered by management.

F. Wishart's Point Landing. DEFER FUNDING. While we supported the board's previous allocation of funds to address an earlier engineering study for this site, difficulties have arisen pertaining to the scope of the original request. Successful completion of that site was predicated upon the ability of the US Army Corps of Engineers to dredge the channel leading to that site. The petitioners acknowledge that this action is nowhere in sight due to limitations in federal funding of such projects. Therefore, this current proposal is an alteration that will result in an overall "nice" facility with one major flaw – namely that it will only accommodate very shallow vessels drawing less than 12 inches. While much of the local area is indeed "fishable, etc." with such craft, the cost of this project takes on a new dimension in the light of not being nearly as cost effective in servicing a wide spectrum of the boating public so typically represented in other projects of similar size/scope. Therefore, we would recommend the board delay approval of further funds for this project pending assurance that an appropriate deep channel will be extended to either of the Wishart's Point proposed sights.

New Projects:

G. 2008 Youth Development "Hooked on Fishing" Adventure (Year 1). PARTIAL / QUALIFIED SUPPORT. The overall intent of this project, like other similar requests, is laudatory. However, we have serious reservations regarding the focus of this particular event. While the amount requested from the board is relatively modest, the actual benefit in terms of numbers of children participating is very limited. Most children's fishing events that have been supported by this fund typically attract between 100-250 children. This event will only be open to 85 scouts over the entire sweep of Chesapeake Bay communities. Regardless of legitimate questions of how this small number is fairly selected, the overriding concern is the endeavor simply does benefit a sufficiently large number of children. However, we could support such a request if it was repackaged in a proposal to either: (1) use head/party boats in an effort to increase the participation base or (2) request a reduced level of funding (approximately \$4,000) proportionate to the smaller number of participating children.

H. Saxis Fishing Pier Expansion. SUPPORT. Access projects such as fishing piers provide a direct return to the fishing public. The extension of this pier should provide the benefits sighted by the petitioners by accommodating more users and opening up even more suitable terrain to those fishermen. Our support is also contingent on the stated intent to allow free pier access to those already entitled to fish in Virginia's salt water environment, i.e., those already possessing salt water recreational fishing licenses, and those specifically exempted from this requirement.

I. Pilot Study: Application to pop-up satellite archival tags (PSATs) to assess postrelease survival, habitat utilization and short term movement of striped bass in Virginia's winter recreational fishery. DO NOT SUPPORT. While the actual goal/nature of this project would seem to embrace the intent of scientific research that provides a benefit to the recreational angling community, we have several concerns regarding the scope and funding for this project. The aspect of assessing postrelease survival based on tagging only 10 fish would indicate most of the focus is actually directed to evaluating the applicability of these tags to striped bass. Secondly, there has already been considerable study that seemingly validates in many species (including striped bass), a marked degree of survivability in those fish caught with circle hooks vs. "j" hooks. Third, this small sampling will probably not result in any near term management steps. We feel the most logical step the VMRC should explore at this juncture is the advertisement/recommendation/etc. for the angling public to wholeheartedly embrace the use of

non-offset circle hooks for the striped bass live bait fishery. This step would seem to be especially prudent at a time when the number of fishermen pursuing this species with live eels is expected to increase dramatically. One might even conjecture the mandatory use of circle hooks in this fishery could reduce/eliminate the requirement for additional reductions in the state's recreational allotment.

J. Improving stock assessment of weakfish. **MINIMAL SUPPORT.** The proposal title would seem to elicit hope that steps will be taken to evaluate the decline in the coast wide decline of grey trout in an effort to eventually affect a recovery of the species. This project's comprehensive approach to developing a new methodology with which to reassess prior data may be a first step towards this goal. However, as the collapse of this important species is a problem impacting the entire mid-Atlantic coast, it would seem logical to expect that at least a portion of the funding, and sponsorship for this, or any related study, should be sought from the ASMFC. If this support was not forthcoming, at least a portion of any local funding should be derived from the commercial sector in that this species has been a major target of their activities. They would correspondingly share the rewards of a major recovery of the species. The board should also bear in mind that this research would seem to be significantly removed from any near-term measures to foster a rebuilding of the weakfish stock.

K. Reef Monitoring Equipment Support for VMRC's Fisheries Management Division. **SUPPORT.** Consistent with our long-standing support of past efforts to support the creation and growth of artificial reefs within the state's waters, we urge approval of this request. We agree this equipment should aid in the monitoring of existing reefs and provide insight into how to more effectively enhance and locate new structures. After the petitioner's initial proposal presentation, the scope and funding of the project was greatly expanded with the inclusion of a remotely-operated vehicle to employ both live video and side scanning sonar. While this would seem to enhance the ability to monitor these sites, our continued support of the proposal is contingent upon the formulation of a systematic utilization plan that will accompany the acquisition of this equipment to ensure optimal program monitoring. In fact, we recommend the board request VMRC to survey each reef site on a regular (annual?) basis and make the findings available to the RFAB and general public.

L. Adult Red Drum Population Structure Study. **SUPPORT.** This relatively modest proposal will hopefully shed light on the nature of the red drum stock that frequents Virginia waters. For the species to have the benefit of a long-term blanket of effective management measures, insight must be gained regarding whether "our" fish are specific to VA/NC waters or are of the same genetic stock inhabiting the entire east coast.

As always, we appreciate the opportunity to express our views on the disbursement of our state's license funds. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Larry Snider

Larry Snider
Vice President & RFAB Coordinator
CCA of Virginia